



Land and Hunger: Making the Rights Connection

Introduction: Workshop Context

The work of Grassroots International is centered on **resource rights**, including the human right to food and the right to access fertile land, clean water and other resources. These issues are at the core of the struggle of many social movements around the world. Our work is rooted in the belief that resource inequities create poverty and cause hunger and instability. Clean water and access to land for food production are essential for human life. Unfortunately, they are no longer treated as **public goods** to which all people have rights, but as commodities that can be sold to the highest bidder.

At the World Food Summit in 1996, 185 countries signed a declaration pledging to decrease the number of hungry people by 50% by the year 2015. Since 1996, the number of hungry people in the world has not decreased but increased from 800 million to over 850 million. The burden of hunger falls disproportionately on the rural poor (small farmers, farm laborers and landless rural people) thanks largely to governments around the world promoting trade, economic and environmental policies to the detriment of the livelihoods of small farmers and community-based agriculture. These policies include “free” trade, subsidies to agribusiness that lead to corporate control of the food industry, excessive promotion of **cash crops** for export, patents and corporate ownership of seeds and a bias in agriculture towards technological fixes and land degradation. Trade agreements and international development banks are taking control of what have traditionally been community decisions: how best to use local resources to meet the needs of local people.

The global movement for resource rights grew out of **globalization’s** impact on rural communities around the world. It is a reflection of the concentrated ownership of agriculture—food, land, seeds and water—in the hands of multinational corporations. Many communities around the world recognize that governments often do not guarantee their citizens’ economic, social, cultural and political rights, especially within the context of globalization; and see them, like multinational corporations as threatening rather than securing their resource rights. At the same time, these communities also recognize the potential and the responsibility of national governments to protect them from the negative impacts that economic globalization has on resource rights.

As globalization facilitates a process where local communities have less control over how land is used, where their food comes from and how it is produced, communities are finding local and global tools and strategies to resist the complex financial and political arrangements that threaten their local way of life. They are finding alternative ways of organizing and managing resources. This quote from Food First points us in the direction of a solution:

“If history has proven one thing, it is that there is no substitute for locally produced food when it comes to preventing hunger. When the poor gain access to productive resources like land, water and forests, ending hunger no longer depends on the vagaries of the world market, access to foreign exchange and superpower goodwill. When there are policies in place that favor—rather than undercut—family farming, then small farmers actually prosper. That is what the fight for **Food Sovereignty** is all about.”

Food First, “The World Food Summit: What Went Wrong?” *News and Views* Summer 2002

At Grassroots International, we follow the lead of social movements around the world as we frame our resource rights work. The examples and concepts discussed in this workshop are shaped by the partner organizations that we work with as they find ways to resist and act both in their local communities and globally. For instance, one of our Brazilian partners, the **Landless Workers Movement (MST)** is engaged in a struggle for land rights for rural landless workers and, simultaneously, is creating alternative economic, social and political communities for those landless workers who have been settled on the land.

This workshop, following the examples of our partner organizations, illustrates the connections between access to resources like food, water, land, seeds and issues of empowerment, the environment, liberation and human rights. In addition, in the process of making these linkages, solutions are being found that illustrate that there is an alternative way of doing things and that “another world is possible.” The global movement for land



Workshop Context, continued

and water rights is an alternative globalization, a Globalization-from-Below, where communities around the world are forming alliances, finding alternative ways of organizing and developing new concepts of agriculture, industry, ecology and showing how they should be managed to promote social and economic justice for all.

Workshop Goals

- To explore the concept of access to resources such as fertile land and clean water as human rights.
- To engage people in a discussion about global systems, institutions and policies that shape hunger, access to food and access to land to grow food in our world today.
- To look at some of the impacts policies related to globalization are having on rural communities around the world.
- To look at ways people are organizing to develop sustainable communities in order to reduce hunger and fight against the policies and issues contributing to food insecurity.

Workshop Design

This workshop consists of a series of exercises. Although some of the exercises can stand alone, the intent is for each one to build off the other. The workshop progresses from entry level exercises that serve as ice breakers to more difficult exercises designed to get into more substantive matter. The assumption here is that no audience will be completely homogeneous. Some of the exercises provide an entry point for people who have absolutely no background on the issues discussed throughout the workshop. Other exercises are substantive enough to engage people with some familiarity with the issues.

Workshop facilitators should use the curriculum as a guide that can be adapted to the needs of the target audience. It is very important to keep your audience in mind. While participants who are not familiar with issues of trade and international development banks will gain from this workshop, it is ideal for people who are somewhat familiar with at least a few of the issues. Facilitators of this workshop do NOT need to be experts on human rights or land issues. Read through the entire curriculum before facilitating a workshop and set aside ample preparation time (at least two hours). This will give you a better sense of the content, expectations and background information you will need to do a workshop. This curriculum also includes a Glossary of terms that may be helpful to you and to workshop participants as you prepare and present the workshop. Glossary terms appear throughout the curriculum in bold.

This workshop is based on several principles of popular education. One principle is that education is not neutral or unbiased, particularly in societies with huge inequities in power, resources and opportunities. Also central to the workshop is the interactive and participatory nature of the exercises. Using personal testimonies, stories and scenarios, exercises are designed to stimulate participant dialogue. People are encouraged to draw on their own experiences and knowledge. This workshop is based on the assumption that education is transformative and rooted in people's experiences. It should enable people to ask their own questions, seek their own answers and define their own directions.



Workshop Design, continued

Time and Participants

The entire workshop lasts approximately 3 hours, but could be shorter depending on the size of the group. It is ideal for an adult audience of twenty to thirty people. If there are time constraints that do not allow for a three-hour workshop, the facilitator can pick and choose exercises based on the audience. For example, if the audience is already familiar with some of the issues, the facilitator can move quickly through exercises one, two and three. If the audience has very little previous knowledge, the facilitator might want to spend more time on exercises one, two and three and skip exercise six. Exercises four, five and six can each be used separately as stand alone exercises.

Grassroots International is open to working with groups or organizations to discuss ways the workshop can be made accessible to their needs and helping facilitators choose what exercises would work best with their target audience.

Cover Photos: Clockwise from left: Skinning peanuts at a women's peanut butter processing cooperative: local jobs, local food, local empowerment. (Jake Miller, Grassroots International); Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST) members march for land rights in Brazil (Andy Lin); These castor bean seeds will be used to generate a local source of alternative energy in the interior of Haiti. (Jake Miller, Grassroots International)